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# Surrey First Peoples Guide for Newcomers

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## Territorial Acknowledgment

This work is taking place on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), q̓ícəy̓ (Katzie), kwikwəłəm (Kwikwetlem), q̓wɑ:ńłəń (Kwantlen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), x̓wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) and scəwaθən məsteyəx̓w (Tsawwassen) First Nations. The knowledge, traditions and ongoing contributions of these communities are significant in providing context to the work of this resource. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging<sup>1</sup>.

The Surrey First Peoples Guide would like to thank Chief Harley Chappell of Semiahmoo First Nation and Chief Marilyn Gabriel for providing their wisdom, truth, and sharing their heartfelt intentions for their communities. These interviews were conducted at a time when these communities were going through incredible challenges. Our hands go up to the tireless efforts of the land-based Nations to assert their rights, not only for themselves but in a way that impacts all Indigenous people in the region. This leadership shows us the spirit of land-based laws, systems of accountability and important teachings that have existed here since time immemorial.

## Welcome

Welcome to the Newcomer's Guide to First Nations. The Surrey First Peoples Guide for Newcomers is a resource responding to the call for accurate resources on the First Peoples in Canada from an Indigenous perspective. In 2018, the Indigenous and Newcomer Youth Dialogues Project brought young people from both communities together to Kwantlen First Nation to learn about their respective lived experiences and build solidarity. Through these dialogues, newcomer youth reported that misconceptions about Indigenous people are normalized (acquired) immediately upon arriving in Canada<sup>2</sup>. This indicates that discrimination against Indigenous people is a norm in Canada and needs to be proactively addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from DIVERSEcity's territorial acknowledgement <https://www.dcrs.ca/contact/>

<sup>2</sup> Amatai Zand's Capstone Report on the Gathering <https://scarp.ubc.ca/sites/scarp.ubc.ca/files/Zand%20%28Amitai%29%20Capstone%20Report.pdf>

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In this resource, we will address misconceptions about Indigenous people and provide clear information about the historic and current realities experienced by Indigenous Métis and Inuit people in Canada. Adopting a community-centred approach, this document seeks to uplift and amplify the voices of the Land-Based Nations that Surrey occupies. This resource will uncover hard truths, construct a foundation for shared understanding, and continue the important work of building solidarity between the Indigenous and newcomer communities in Surrey.

In 2014, the City of Vancouver released the First Peoples Guide for Newcomers. This extensive report offered clear information about Indigenous, Métis and Inuit people in Canada. Author, Kory Wilson is now the Executive Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Kory has authored a free, interactive, online course called the Indigenous Awareness Modules<sup>3</sup>. This report will reference Kory's work to ensure that we are not doubling our efforts, and that we are creating space to uplift the voices of local, land-based leaders, and to honour the writers, knowledge keepers and Elders who have done this work before us in a good way.

The Surrey First People's Guide will use a community-centered method that uplifts the stories of the land-based Nations, urban populations, and Indigenous champions. Anti-Indigenous racism is a common experience for Indigenous people living in Surrey.<sup>4</sup> Racism and stereotypes have negative effects on Indigenous people in many sectors, including health, education, and social services. When racial stereotypes are normalized, Indigenous people face barriers to success. Actively dismantling these stereotypes and normalized biases will work to ensure that Indigenous, Metis, and Inuit people in Surrey live free from colonial harm.

## Indigenous Protocols

Protocols are part of complex Indigenous law systems. Traditional laws and protocols differ from nation to nation. Protocols refer to how land-based Nations conduct ceremonies, welcome guests, honour their ancestors and respect the lands of Nations they visit. Although diverse, these law systems predate contact by thousands of years. Protocols are actions that ensure respectful relationships between different Nations. For instance, when a neighbouring tribe would visit Semiahmoo they would back their canoes into shore. This was a sign that they were approaching the Nation's village with respect and sometimes with the spirit of celebration. Songs would be sung to welcome the guests to shore. (Chappell, 2021). Today, one protocol that is commonly observed is doing a territorial acknowledgment.

During colonization, protocols, and Indigenous law systems embedded in cultural practices were outlawed by the Indian Act from 1884- 1951. The Indian Act was a tool to

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<sup>3</sup> BCIT Indigenous Modules <https://www.bcit.ca/indigenousservices/resources/indigenous-modules/>

<sup>4</sup> Skookub Lab report on Racism <https://surreyindigenouslead@ship.ca/downloads/anti-racism-report.pdf>

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assimilate Indigenous communities into Canada. Indigenous people would have been arrested if they were caught practicing their traditional protocols. The effects from this prohibition have had long-standing impacts on passing down protocols and cultural acts<sup>5</sup>. Today, practicing protocols, such as territorial acknowledgments, play a vital role in cultural reclamation.

Chief Harley Chappell of Semiahmoo First Nation says “Welcoming other tribes [and] other nations [are] a time when we use our ancestral songs. I was taught that song is the first language. So, when we would welcome one another when they would visit our community [we would sing] and that is something we still practice today. When we do our canoe journeys, we will sing those songs before we come on the beach. We'll pull up to the shore, and we'll sing those songs, those welcome songs and those love songs. And then we would turn our canoes around and we back them out. Because being here we would understand that if a canoe would [approach] headfirst, it was a sign of war. It was a sign of conflict. There are very different tones to our welcome songs as opposed to our war songs. And the people would know by the different songs, how the people are approaching. But really, I think it's [acknowledging] we're on somebody else's land. We don't just come into somebody else's territory and [plop] down and do whatever we want to do. That's really what happened here in British Columbia. It is a sign of respect and a good practice that we acknowledge that we're on these territories, and these are the original people of this land.”<sup>6</sup>

## The Importance of the Territorial Acknowledgment

Territorial acknowledgements are important because they recognize the long-standing relationships land-based Nations have with the land. One of the most critical impacts of colonization was that Indigenous landbases were reduced to 0.2%.<sup>7</sup> This has had devastating impacts on Indigenous people. By acknowledging the land-based Nations, you are honouring the history of the lands where you reside or where your gathering is taking place. That history includes Indigenous people's relationship with the land since time immemorial, and acknowledges the rights and title they have to their homelands.

A land-acknowledgement is a small act- often done before a gathering, meeting, or event to show respect for First Nations and their relationships to this land. Land-based Indigenous laws and protocols ensured that the land was taken care of for future generations. It is important to acknowledge the intentions that First Peoples had to care for the land in a spirit of reciprocity, stewardship and relationship.

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<sup>5</sup> Kory Wilson - Pulling Together <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/chapter/the-indian-act/>

<sup>6</sup> Personal Communication, February 29, 2021

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Manual <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/arthur-manuels-battle-against-the-0.2-per-cent-indigenous-economy>

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Kory Wilson states, "Here in BC, you will often hear the term 'unceded.'" When land is 'ceded' it means that there was a formal agreement made to share or give the land to another party. Most of the land in BC was never formally ceded. "Ninety-five percent of British Columbia, including Vancouver, is on unceded traditional First Nations territory. Unceded means that First Nations people never ceded or legally signed away their lands to the Crown or to Canada"<sup>8</sup>

In 2013, Vancouver City Council began acknowledging the unceded territories of the Squamish, Tsleil Waututh and the Musqueam First Nations. The legislation reads, "On National Aboriginal Day, June 21, 2013, the Mayor of the City of Vancouver took the extraordinary step of declaring a Year of Reconciliation, a year-long effort that seeks to heal from the past and build new relationships between Aboriginal peoples and all Vancouverites, built on a foundation of openness, dignity, understanding and hope"

In the legislation, the document states that "Underlying all other truths spoken during the Year of Reconciliation is the truth that the modern city of Vancouver was founded on the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and that these territories were never ceded through treaty, war or surrender;"<sup>9</sup>

By acknowledging the territories, Canadians are taking a small step towards fostering good relations between themselves and Indigenous people. Today in Canada, Indigenous governments and organizations are still having to continually advocate for equal opportunity<sup>10 11</sup>, for their rights to be acknowledged<sup>12</sup> and to be able to live a life free from harm<sup>13</sup>. Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Knowledge Keeper and Consultant, Ta7taliya (Michelle Nahanee) states, "I've been taught by my Elders and others who know that territorial acknowledgements are about showing respect, or connecting to the land, to be in better relations together,"<sup>14</sup>

Being in good relations is an Indigenous protocol that all Canadians can learn and benefit from.

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<sup>8</sup> Kory Wilson - Pulling Together <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/chapter/the-indian-act/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://council.vancouver.ca/20140624/documents/motionb3.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cssspnql.com/en/news-media/single/2016/01/26/human-rights-tribunal-finds-the-canadian-government-is-racially-discriminating-against-163000-first-nations-children>

<sup>11</sup> [https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2020.02.03\\_-\\_caring\\_society\\_written\\_submissions\\_re\\_non-agency\\_communities.pdf](https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2020.02.03_-_caring_society_written_submissions_re_non-agency_communities.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1569/index.do>

<sup>13</sup> <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/613/2020/11/In-Plain-Sight-Summary-Report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/land-acknowledgements-british-columbia/>